

IV

FORT UTAH "MISSION"

MEMBERS of the expedition had been most favorably impressed by the land in Utah Valley. Oliver Huntington hazarded the opinion that this valley "would be the end of my searches to find a more pleasant and delightful home";¹ and Hosea Stout pronounced the Provo "a fine large Stream & well timbered on the Valley . . . a beautiful farming country."² Within three days after the return of the company Alexander Williams announced his intention of farming in Utah Valley; he proposed "to take some of Prest. Young's cows, and instruct the widows and orphans of the four Indians killed the previous Monday to farm, etc."³ The Indian women and children seem to have been averse to accepting such philanthropic attention, and ultimately they went north to join a Shoshone band.⁴

At a council meeting on March 10 Brigham Young called thirty men to settle Utah Valley at once "for the purpose of farming, and fishing and of instructing the Indians in cultivating the earth and teaching them civilization." John S. Higbee, William Wadsworth, Dimick B. Huntington, Samuel Ewing, Peter W. Conover, Houghton Conover, Alexander Williams, and John Scott were named to go. By March 17 thirty-three colonists were preparing to depart. The "mission" was organized the next day under the leadership of John S. Higbee, president and bishop; Isaac Higbee, first counselor, and Dimick B. Huntington, second counselor.⁵

March had nearly passed before the colonists completed their plans for departure. Wagons had to be loaded, stock rounded up, and the details of organization settled. It took three days to make the trip with ox-teams, a few horses, and cows. Farm implements were carried, together with seeds and household equipment. Only six families accompanied the original party. This was rather unusual, later "missions" taking all the families with them. As the settlers neared the banks of the Provo River, they were met by Angatewats, a young Indian brave, who blocked the trail with his horse. Dimick B. Huntington "pleaded for them to try the emigrants a while and see if they could not live in peace together."⁶ After a short parley, Huntington was "made to raise his right hand and swear by the sun that the white people would not drive the Indians away, or take from them any of their rights."⁷ The whites were then permitted to advance. They crossed the river and camped on the south side near the lower crossing (approximately First North and 18th West if present streets extended that distance), at what was later known as Old Fort Field.⁸

The erection of fort-style houses was commenced at once. Built around an ancient mound, "Fort Utah" measured 20 by 40 rods, and was surrounded by a 14-foot stockade with gates at the east and west ends. Box elder trees, more durable and more accessible than cottonwood trees, were used for lumber. Within the stockade, log cabins, generally roofed with split lumber and dirt, were grouped side by side. Each boasted two cloth-covered windows. Puncheons were used for flooring. The vacant spaces between the houses were filled with pickets embedded closely together in the ground. A cattle corral, attached to the southeast corner of the stockade, was used at night, and a guardhouse was erected within the corral. Smaller private corrals were placed behind some of the cabins. A